DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 039 945 PS 003 127

AUTHOR Burnett, Jacquetta H.
TITLE Culture of the School: A Construct for Research and Explanation in Education.
INSTITUTION Illinois Univ., Urbana. Bureau of Educational Research.
PUB DATE Mar 70
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Minneapolis, Minnesota, March, 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.80
DESCRIPTORS Community Characteristics, Cultural Differences, Cultural Disadvantagement, Cultural Factors, *Cultural Pluralism, *Culture Conflict, *Educational Problems, *School Environment, Second Language Learning

ABSTRACT

The conflict of cultures in the classroom is the urgent educational issue to which this paper is addressed. School cultures are sub-sets of the culture of organized institutions in which they are formed. In our ethnically pluralistic society the school run and staffed by white middle class educators (as most are) fails to make a cultural match with the communities in which they operate. Misunderstanding of the resulting conflict led to such ethnocentric and culturally chauvinistic explanations as the "cultural deprivation" of blacks and Puerto Ricans. Though we claim to have moved beyond this point of misunderstanding now, we have yet to solve the problem of the child who must not only learn to read and write a different language or dialect than he hears and speaks outside the school, but must also do so through situations and procedures that are culturally foreign to his experience. There is a need for commitment to research and practice with a cultural perspective, a perspective which suggests that the school culture is a second culture to be added to a child's repertoire, rather than a replacement for the ethnic group culture already existing. (MH)

ED039945

Jacquetta H. Burnett
University of Illinois
Bureau of Educational Research

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Presented at AERA
Minneapolis, 1970

Not to be reproduced in part
or in whole without permission
from the author.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Jacquetta H. Burnett
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL: A CONSTRUCT FOR RESEARCH AND EXPLANATION IN EDUCATION

School cultures are no more than a special case of the culture of organized institutions. The concept is particularly useful for that type of institution known as "a complex organization." The idea of cultures of schools, as I have thought about it, is derived from the notion that a standard organizational setting has a set of culture patterns according to which the on-going human activities that typify the organization are carried out. The culture of a school, however, should not be confused with the culture of a tribe, an ethnic group, a community, or even perhaps a social class.

To be more specific, if one thinks of defining a community in terms of activities, one would think of it as the full round of activities that were essential to survival of the social group in its given environment and to manifesting the particular style and manner of living that had come to characterize the group of people in question. Any complex organization characterizing a community, consists of a subset of the community's full round of activities. The organization has some functional part to play in the community, some charter purpose as Malinowski might put it (19½). Some of the purposes of activities then would be related to this "charter" function of the institutional organization in the community.

The culture of any institution is an incomplete set of patterns--too limited to serve as a system of guides and of functions for the full round of life or to provide the rule-guides all for the activities that

PS 003127

embody the full round of life. Presumably, ethnic communities have a full set of such patterns. Should the national superstructure disappear, or even the immediate urban superstructure disappear, such a community with a few adjustments could carry on as an independent structural and cultural unit. An ethnic enclave or neighborhood, presumably is less capable of such independent operation, and is therefore, not a unit culture. And further along the dimension of independence--dependence, a school culture is entirely incapable of providing activities, procedures, personnel, etc., to carry on the full round of life. In this sense then, the culture of a school is assumed to be a subset of a full set of cultural patterns characterizing a community.

In a complex cultural setting such as a national state or a culturally plural urban setting there are a number of theoretically possible candidates for the mother set of activities of which the local school is a subset. This is the school's culture of reference.

When I use the notion of reference culture, I have in mind a concept of culture that includes not only the activity level we spoke of above, but also includes an emphasis on the "rule-guides" that summarize the activities in terms of ordered elements. There are then two fundamental aspects of culture--culture at the symbolic level consisting of rules and standards. The other basic aspect of culture is behavioral in the form of action, feeling, interaction, material items, all in time and space. The latter might be called the concrete level. From the point of view of scientific description it is essential to distinguish these two levels. The operation of a rule-guide at the phenomenal level, requires that it be referred to the behavioral and situational context. Actually a rule-guide tends to refer to relatively simple sets of actions or bits of behavior; pattern is used to refer to a complex set of behavior comprised of sets

of rules. The rules can be constructed into a model of how the group members organize their experience in terms of perceiving, predicting, judging, and acting. Thus, the reference culture of a school culture is the one from which the school and its personnel draw the rule-guides and standards of behavior and relationship for the activities that characterize the school. Just to elaborate briefly, it provides the standards for deciding what is--the percepts and concepts; standards for deciding what can be; i.e., the propositions and beliefs by which to explain events and design procedures; standards for deciding what to do about it, the operational procedures for dealing with people and material things. (Goodenough)

Up to this point, I've been thinking very much in model terms. I've been using linguistic theory as a model theory because I think there are certain structural similarities between language and other types of behavioral phenomena included under the rubric concept culture. However, I do <u>not</u> assume that the structure of these other sub-types of cultural phenomena are isomorphic with linguistic theory, in the same sense that the structure of a theory may be isomorphic with a mathematical or logical system. That carries the analogy between the two farther than I, as yet, think is warranted. Yet, following Goodenough, I am using linguistic theory as a model for culture theory for purposes of discovery. In this sort of model thinking, when the relationships among elements and the propositions from one area of inquiry are well known, they may be applied to less well-understood areas, in order to discover new relationship, new regularities, new laws which are operative, but unknown (Teune, 1964:301).

Continuing with the theme, the reference culture is the one from which the subset of rule-guides relevant to the activities of the school are drawn. And if different classes of personnel within a given

school refer to a different cultural or ethnic setting for their rule guides, there exists in the school both a culture contact situation and a culture conflict situation. Actually, the school as a social organizational type appears to work most effectively, i.e., to accomplish its charter purposes most readily, under the simple condition that staff personnel and student clientel in the organization are from or can use the same culture of reference, even though there may be some variation based on sex and age-graded versions of the culture of reference.

Where political control permits, teachers are recruited on the basis of their cultural fitness; i.e., on the basis of their ability to conform to the culture of the local community in which the particular school is located. Thus, homogeneity can be maintained through teacher recruitment, in many of the better suburbs, with independent school systems. This recruitment preference often is further maintained by an interesting arrangement of feeder relationships between school systems and higher educational institutions. For example, within the state of Illinois there is a distinct preference by the wealthier suburbs for teacher graduates from the "better" universities in the state, both public and private. Even there, I understand from a personnel officer of one of these universities, the recruiters are very careful to pick teachers who will "fit" their kind of people. In contrast, rural schools draw their teachers from the smaller institutions of higher education that stand in secondary or tertiary position in prestige. Most of their college-bound high school graduates go to, and graduate from these types of institutions--with some exceptions, of course, but not usually among those who opt for teaching as a career. Inner city schools in Chicago, Illinois, draw the largest portion of their teacher personnel from city colleges, with which they have close "feeder" relationships.

Control over teacher recruitment requires political and economic control in the political unit of the school district. Where this is not vested in the standing organizations of the constituency from which student clientel are drawn--of the people of the neighborhood, the students will often represent a different culture of reference than that of teachers, and particularly that of administrators. In these cases the dominant culture of the day-to-day life of the school is likely to be that of the politically dominant culture in the political unit in question--whether county, city, region, or nation state.

In these cases the school is an interface for culture contact. Thus, a school with a predominantly Puerto Rican student clientel in Chicago, nevertheless, is not likely to be Puerto Rican in school culture. The subset of culture patterns of that school are not likely to be the same as the subset of culture patterns which typify schools in Puerto Rico. In this instance children from Puerto Rican households face not only the challenge of learning to read and count, they also face the cultural problem of learning new procedures for learning to read, count, and for carrying out any other activities that are part of the schools repertoire. In brief, they are in a culture contact situation.

The concept of culturally disadvantaged or culturally deprived is exactly the kind of ethnocentric concept one could expect to develop in a culture contact situation. It is the kind of ethnocentric judgment or explanation that one would expect to arise to explain the unexpected results when the activities in the sector of the school were not complementary, instrumentally contingent, and similar (or overlapping) with the activities in the home.

There's been a good bit of talk lately about the fact that schools really can't do much at all about teaching kids to read and to count. The

PS 003127

story goes that the actual learning is done outside of schools, in households where the family members already know how to do it, although the schools take the credit. Some children learn to read or count in school; some learn outside school. But the basic procedures for how to go about many of the activities of the school are learned outside of school and are assumed as a "given" by school personnel. Teachers depend on this; they will tell you they depend upon it--except not usually in those terms. Thus, unless children learn the procedure for the activity of taking a book home, and returning it promptly the next day, clean and unscarred, they are not likely to be permitted to carry out the activity sequence of assign-study-recite. The teacher is reluctant to assign them something to read on their own at home and to await their return with clean books in hand the next day to recite about it in school. For one thing without careful, knowledgeable supportive action from the household, the kids never seem to be able to get their books back with them the next day. The breakdown in instrumental contingencies of activities between school and household is a great source of failure in the key purposes of schools for children in culturally different areas. The school staff calls the children deprived and the ethnic constituency calls the school staff incompetent. There is both incompetency and cultural disadvantagement in a certain portion of the cases, but those concepts just don't explain the greater portion of the cases. Even technically competent teachers, superbly prepared in their subject matter specialities are known to be flops with a goodly proportion of their students in these culture contact situations. And certain children have been poorly taught in <u>any</u> cultural tradition and need all kinds of supplementary, supportive learning and enculturation. But lack of fit between socialization and schooling are not those same problems.

Recently, a very gloomy report has been published on the general effectiveness of Head Start programs to produce lasting cognitive gain (Cicirelli, 1969). The report has been sharply criticized, but even critics do agree that the report data show gains up through grade one; but thereafter the extra gains of the Head Start experience were lost. Several years ago, in pre-Head Start days, certain specific pre-school programs, if carefully designed and carefully implemented, were claimed to increase the cognitive performance of disadvantaged children. One pre-school program that according to reports does maintain its gains and with which I'm most familiar, has always reminded me of TESL operations in classrooms where English is being taught as a foreign language. Their approach is similar--in their attention to elemental precepts and action, and in drill routines with carefully designed teaching techniques. Because the pre-school children are learning new "ways" that cover a wider spectrum than those associated with language, the children's backgrounds have been regarded or defined as deprived and disadvantaged. Yet second language lessons with adults of even greatest language capacity and of exceptionally rich experience and training, often have about them the same appearance of relearning at an idiotic level of specificity.

In second language learning we now understand that the early stages involve reconditioning, rehabituation, and learning of a second, alternative way of speaking at the most elemental level, a situation in which all sorts of Pavlovian devices work. But because this is so, we know in second language-learning that the necessity to go through the process is not due to the inherent, genetic inferiority of the learner; nor do we assume it entails an indictment of the linguistic adequacy of the learner's first language system and its relegation to inherently

inferior status. Rather the learners' first language is a different system with contrastive, overlapping and irrelevant features, so far as the new language is concerned. Second language learning is facilitated by having essential teaching information about the first language of the speaker, as well as through knowledge of the second language. And certain linguistic approaches to teaching techniques help to incorporate the knowledge of the two into a more effective program.

We seem to be able to accept this view of second language learning. We need not invoke the theory of genetic difference or of social pathology to explain why people must behave like babbling babes in order to learn a second language effectively. Yet, this may be the best model for recognizing what is going on in the effective, workable preschool programs for culturally different groups, that do have carryover into their ability to negotiate the culture of most schools.

Stephen and Joan Baratz recently have called early childhood intervention "a social science base for institutional racism," because most programs have been based on a theory of social pathology, and have failed (1970). The failure leaves the field to the explanatory theory based on genetic differences in race. Their view (the Baratz's) is that a cultural theory is a viable and needed explanatory framework. Educators they say, who are unaware of culture (I would add--of their own as well as the children's culture) and the alternative conceptual framework it offers, have followed "ethnocentric methodologies and theories which do not give credence to the cognitive and intellectual skills of the child" (1970:47).

At present there is considerable lack of studies with culturally oriented methodologies to provide a description of what actually does happen in the homes in which deprivations are alledged to give rise to deficiency. There are even fewer studies done at the level of microethnography which coordinate the research on school cultures and household culture.

In order to view the situation in cultural terms, I would like to return briefly to the view of a community as a systematically interrelated set of activities. In the idealized terms of the perfectly functioning community, the activities of any constituent institutional organization would be complementary and interrelated to the activities of other sections of the community--in several ways. Activities can be thought of with some precision as having (1) time and space requirements; (2) occasions for performance; (3) personnel and social organizational requirements; (4) procedures; and (5) purpose (Goodenough, 1963). This is at the concrete level; at the phenomenal level there are the standards for perceiving, predicting, judging, and acting that we referred to as rule-guides. As we have said activities may be related to one another in several ways. Activities may have features that overlap, i.e., they are alike in certain respects. Perhaps two activities have the same purpose, serve to accomplish the same function, but nevertheless involve different procedures. Or perhaps purpose is different, but they have the same time-space demands; or perhaps the personnel involved in two different activities are the same, i.e., have feature overlap with respect to the standing set of actors, of persons who carry out the activity. The fusion of activities or a fusion relationship, is important, as it refers to an activity being multipurposed. Thus, collecting money for the Red Cross in schools may be seen to serve a socializing purpose as well as a charitable purpose.

A specific complementary relationship may characterize activities distributed in the institutional organization of a community. Between home and school, activities are often complementary with respect to actors and time and space. Mothers work outside the home while teachers <u>supervise</u> the children during school activities. Shifts in scheduling of the school

often can produce major crisis in the timing of mother's schedules of activities. Finally, the instrumental linkage among activities is a most significant relationship for activities. This relationship refers to the condition that carrying out activity "B," assumes activity "A." The activities are interconnected, such that the purpose, or outcome of one, provides the conditions necessary to the performance of another activity. The ethnographic description of school cultures and household culture in terms of activities and the question of general complementary of activities can be a most productive approach to the question of the relationship of school culture to its cultural context. This must, however, be at the microanalytic level, much more than at the "global pattern" level.

For example the lack of feature overlap in many activities, goes right to the minutest detail of percept and concept. Again let me invoke a linguistic model to present the point more clearly. Among languages, percepts may differ at the level of phonemes. Thus, we make the fine distinction between "v" and "b." But to the native Spanish speaker a mere shift of the lower lip from articulation with the teeth to articulation with the upper lip does not produce a meaningful difference in sound. Thus, to say you are very bright and you are berry bright sounds the same to the Spanish speaker.

Now at the behavioral level, suppose you were a teacher conducting a lesson before a group of eighth graders and had just discovered that one of the students was without a book. You ask, "Eva, where is your book?" Eva turns her head slightly, purses her lips, and casts her eyes down. What does it mean to you? The down cast eyes probably suggest that something deceptive is going on; the pursed lips that she's pouting and defiant; and the turned head a gesture of escape, or worse hautiness. To Eva, if she's

Puerto Rican, they do not mean that at all. The Puerto Ricans, often point with their lips. So Eva is pointing at the fellow student who has her book! But in those elementary school desks she has to turn around a bit to do the pointing. Her down cast eyes are a gesture of respect, a procedure that she's been carefully taught by her parents if they really care that she be well behaved and mannerly. It's terrible manners to stare a person straight in the eye! Yet, I wish I had a dollar in my pocket for every time I've seen a North American teacher jerk or pull a Puerto Rican child's chin up as he, or she, talks to the child. That's the more dignified type; the more companionable, empathetic type crouch down to try to get lower than the child's eyes. The example refers to what might be a very minute difference; but this particular cultural difference, this lack of feature overlap in a procedure, is a chronic troublemaker in the school lives of students and teachers. There is moreover, ironic circularity to it. The more the teacher influences the Puerto Rican parent to teach his children to be mannerly, the more the Puerto Rican parent strives to teach his child fine Puerto Rican manners, like casting down his eyes when speaking to adults; and the more the child responds to his training the more chin jerking he gets.

The melting pot answer is for the parents to learn the new patterns; from my point of view, that asks that the people with the least financial and educational resources, and the least experience, to do the work of intercultural adjustment; they and their children are asked to carry the burden of mediating change. To my mind that is the least efficient and effective procedure. I see the best bet to be preparation of <u>teachers and administrative personnel</u> for working in intercultural situations. A complement to this is parent groups, not likely PTA, but parent group meetings

in which they are introduced to the local school culture as a second culture, not to replace their own, but to be added to their private repertoir of culture systems.

There must be some assurance about compromise and give-and-take concerning whose rule guide will take precedence where conflict arises, that do not always find the subordinate culture giving precedence to the dominant culture. I question whether the objectives of cultural pluralism can be pursued in the presence of highly centralized political and economic control of schools. The recent posture of teachers unions has added to my doubts. They have argued against decentralization of political control on the basis that technical educational matters ought to be left to the professionals. But looking at the matter from the vantage point of the view that schools have culture, a goodly part of this issue clearly is not a technical educational matter in the traditional psychological sense; it is a cultural matter. To insist on its technical character amounts to making, in this situation, the same kind of error that has undermined many overseas technical assistance programs. These projects, it turned out, were not a matter of technical change alone, but also of culture change, or at least of cultural adaptation. Programs of culture change don't come off without direct involvement with and of members of the culture experiencing the innovations. I do recognize also that it would be a mistake to assume that technical competence is irrelevant. The Peace Corps experience taught us that that is dangerous in the other extreme.

It is a question of sufficient political leverage to assure--as the Baratzes put it "acculturation to the mainstream while maintaining [the child's] individual identity and cultural heritage"-- while at the same time utilizing the trained competency that is available. In the

absence of culturally based programs, the only forceful counter-move against the present stand-off in schools that are interfaces for different cultures, is the movement to make the culture of reference of staff and students the same by drawing them from the same ethnic population. Clearly better ethnic, such as black, Puerto Rican, Chicano, etc., representation among professional teachers and supervisors is necessary. But it is a short-term answer so far as many local schools are concerned. In urban areas ethnic enclaves flow and ethnics move like rivers, through the schools. So in my Puerto Rican neighborhood even if half the staff were Puerto Rican, as now over 75 percent of the students are, in five to seven years, thirty to fifty percent of the students will be black. And the same inter-cultural stand off will once again re-emerge.

But the bicultural problem, of allowing ethnics to maintain identity with a preferred culture, while at the same time learning to negotiate effectively in the institutions of work and politics, the culture patterns of which are based on different cultures of reference, requires a careful, microanalysis of the rule-guides and procedures that characterized the culture of these organizations, the culture of the school, and the culture of the households. And it requires in conjunction with that the development of more intercultural teaching and learning based on the assumption that teachers and learners are operating in an intercultural context. It may offer some small comfort to know that the questions posed here are not confined to our own crisis over poverty and pluralism. Many other culturally plural national states which have attempted to use schools as instruments of economic and political development also share these problems in one form or another.

Baratz, Stephen S., and Joan C. Baratz

1970 Early Childhood Intervention: The Social Science Base of Institutional Racism. Harvard Educational Review, 40:29-50.

Cicirelli, Victor G.

1970 The Impact of Headstart: A Reply. Harvard Educational Review, 40:105-129.

Goodenough, Ward H.

1963 Cooperation in Change: Russell Sage Foundation, New York.

Malinowski, Bronislaw

1960 A Scientific Theory of Culture. Oxford University Press, New York.

Smith, Marshall S., and Joan S. Bissell

1970 The Impact of Headstart: The Westinghouse-Ohio Head Start Evaluation, Harvard Educational Review, 40:51-104.

Teune, Harry

1964 "Models in the study of Political Integration" in Philip E. Jacob and James E. Toscano, Eds., The Integration of Political Communities, Lippincott, Philadelphia, pp 283-303.